

Museum spotlights U.S. mistake

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A SHAMEFUL piece of history, the World War II internment of whole families of Japanese-Americans as enemies of the nation, has returned with the opening of an on-site internment camp museum in California, a reminder of an awful government mistake.

It wasn't the case that federal officials ordered that those people "relocated" there and in other camps in the West — some Japanese nationals but most of them Japanese-Americans — be executed or beaten or starved or otherwise abused by their American military guards.

The shame of it was in punishment they didn't deserve, confinement without due process that robbed the victims of homes and livelihoods and property they could never reclaim, separated them from friends and loved ones, stripped them of their dignity and rights as Americans and scarred them for the rest of their lives as suspects, not just different but dangerous to other Americans.

In some historical revisions, the shameful American episode has come down to us through the recall of writers not even alive then as evidence — more evidence — of the essential racism, brutality, the meanness of majority white Amer-

icans.

There seems to be an assumption in much of the current reporting of the internment that Americans wanted most of all to hurt somebody in the days immediately after Dec. 7, 1941, and took their anger out on the easiest and most obvious targets, defenseless and loyal Japanese-Americans.

A part of the media contribution in recent weeks has been to search out dependably dimwitted Americans who'll say of the forced internment of Japanese-Americans that "they deserved it," that it was a suitable revenge against Japanese-Americans for the Japanese nation's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Of course, there were dimwitted Americans back then — plenty of them — who demanded that Japanese-Americans be punished. But in my memory and most of the record of the time, it wasn't revenge that caused the government to act so shamefully against fellow citizens of Japanese descent. It was fear and fear-driven acts that misguided officials — clear up to President Roosevelt — believed were necessary to protect the nation.

It was a dark, fearful time. Already unprepared for war, America's Pacific fleet was largely destroyed in the Pearl Harbor attack. The Japanese nation, which had actually gone to war against China in 1931, had gone on after Pearl Harbor, striking throughout

Southeast Asia and the Pacific and winning everywhere.

Closer and more frightening were reports — most apparently false — of Japanese submarines and surface warships operating along the West Coast, even shelling oil refineries and other targets. There was a feeling we were defenseless, vulnerable.

Large public gatherings were discouraged as inviting a Japanese attack. Unreasoned fear of attack was so compelling that the Rose Bowl game, always played before and since in Pasadena, was played Jan. 1, 1942, in Durham, N.C.

In what was asserted to be the national interest, it was ordered that people of Japanese ancestry — American men, women and children — should be rounded up, transported inland and confined in camps. That's what was done and not completely undone, not even when young men left those camps for U.S. military service, some of them to die, many to return as heroic combat veterans.

And there are now, as there were then, demands that the government do something or a lot of things to protect Americans. Right now. And if some people complain their rights are violated in the fight against terrorism, we can sort that out later, like we sorted out the rights of the interned Japanese-Americans.

Tailings from the Atlas uranium mill rest on an earthquake fault some 750 feet from the Colorado River.

nia into the groundwater, which slowly migrates to the river.

"Atlas doesn't have the money to do it either way," said Hedden, a former Grand County councilman and Atlas mill worker. "Let's get Atlas off the hook and out of here."

Leavitt said the objective of the campaign is to secure additional state and federal money to move the pile.

Atlas bought the mill in 1962 from Charlie Steen, an itinerant geologist whose 1952 strike of uranium sparked a mining boom that brought thousands of prospectors and laborers to the region hoping

to find their fortune in uranium mining.

One of those looking for work was Dale Edwards. The 18-year-old high school graduate was hired to build the mill and worked his way up to chief chemist in the lab. The Cold War-era mill produced millions of pounds of "yellowcake" — refined uranium ore used in production of nuclear weapons and energy.

Today, Edwards, 67, is the sole employee at the mill. He runs regular tests to measure contamination of the water, dirt and air at the site, where only one building re-

mains of the once-bustling plant that employed thousands.

Edwards and his employer dismiss the calls to move the tailings as unnecessary scare tactics.

"Personally, I still have a problem having taxpayers picking up the freight on a project that benefits very few people," said Richard Blubaugh, vice president of environmental and government affairs for Atlas.

He contends natural outcroppings of uranium in cliffs along the river put as much or more uranium into the river as the tailings pile.

Mom and Dad
careful when you snip the trees
you don't snip the power lines.
Love Debra